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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BEIRUT 003889

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING, STATE FOR NEA/ELA,
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI EXPLAINS, "I AM A MOUNTAIN
CLIMBER."

Classified By: DCM Christopher W. Murray. Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On December 18 Senators Christopher Dodd and John Kerry met with Saad Hariri, Member of Parliament and leader of the Mustaqbal party. Hariri advised the Codel that progress in the region, and particularly in Lebanon, requires that the international community take a firm and united stand on Syria and Iran. The international community must be willing to back up that commitment with direct action if necessary. When Dodd suggested that Hariri had a mountain to climb in getting the Lebanese government on track, Hariri replied, &I am a mountain climber.8 End Summary.

CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

2. (C) Hariri said much of the unrest in Lebanon is being promoted by Syria and Iran for their own benefit, and at Lebanon's expense. Lebanon is being used in a regional struggle for power by Syria and Iran against other Arab nations and the international community. He added that Iran and Syria are using the threat of internal unrest in Lebanon and other countries to distract the world from Iran's nuclear program. He described Iran's actions in Lebanon as being a mirror image of its actions in Palestine.8 He argued that there could never be a unity government in Lebanon, because Syria and Iran want leverage in Lebanon. Since there is more leverage to be had for outsiders in the absence of an internal agreement, Syria and Iran will not permit Hizballah to enter into a truly national unity government

3. (C) Hariri said the country is evenly split between supporters of the March 14 movement, and those supporting the March 8 movement of Hizballah, General Michel Aoun, and others of the opposition. Hariri was confident that the March 14 movement would prevail, because it has as its allies in the Arab World, Europe and the United States. The opposition only has Syria and Iran. The opposition's power comes from its readiness to resort to violence, while the March 14 movement will not do so. The opposition's power also lies in the fact that it is always ready to carry out its threats, while the March 14 movement will threaten but not act. If the West will not act, the extremists will gain power, and the democracies in the region will fade. The West cannot merely say that it will support the Sinora government; it must provide material support for the Lebanese Armed Forces

in the form of weapons (even heavy weapons), training, and possibly even direct action if necessary. Hariri added that if the international community will not act to support Lebanon, after having said that it would, the international community should so inform the Lebanese government so that the Lebanese can talk to Iran to avoid bloodshed.

14. (C) Hariri, in response to a question on Sunni-Shia conflict in Iraq and Lebanon, described the two situations as entirely different. The Iraqis see the western forces as invaders, which gives them a common cause. If fighting were to break out between the Shia and the Sunnis in Lebanon, there would be repercussions throughout the region, including Syria and Saudi Arabia.

SPECIAL TRIBUNAL COULD SOLVE THE CRISIS

15. (C) Hariri set out two elements to address the current crisis in Lebanon: 1) support of the Special Tribunal to prosecute those responsible for the Rafiq Hariri assassination; and 2) full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701, calling for the disarmament of Hizballah. Over the past 35 years, he said, there have been many acts of violence and assassination in Lebanon, for which no person has ever been held accountable. That none of the perpetrators were punished has given some a sense of the ability to act with impunity. This perception has weakened the government and emboldened the militants. Members of the Lebanese government are afraid of becoming &sitting ducks8 for the militants. This perceived ability to act with impunity must end. He told the Codel that the Special Tribunal must be enacted to let those who sponsored his father,s assassination know that they can no longer act

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without fear of prosecution. Such support would send a message to the region that interference in the affairs of other nations and sponsorship of terrorism will not be tolerated. He added that in his mind, the Syrians, insistence that senior members of government not be held accountable for the actions of subordinates is a tacit admission of guilt.

UNSCR 1701) DISARMAMENT

16. (C) Hariri said that UNSCR 1701 stopped the July-August conflict in Lebanon, and brought about the deployment of UNIFIL soldiers to the south of the country. It was 1701 that led to a stronger UNIFIL, and enabled the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to re-take the south from Hizballah. He cautioned that 1701 had not yet been fully implemented, and if it were not fully implemented, there could be more unrest in the south, and possibly another fight with Israel.

ISRAEL

17. (C) Senator Dodd asked Hariri what chance he saw for an agreement between Lebanon and Israel on unified action in regard to Iran. Hariri stated that he believed such an agreement was possible, but noted that several things would have to happen before such an agreement could be reached. First, the international community had to make UNSCR 1701 a priority, and to see that it was fully implemented. Second, the Special Tribunal to try those accused of the Hariri assassination had to move forward. For either of those goals to be reached, pressure had to be applied to Syria.

18. (C) Israel could take several steps to help the Lebanese government take away Hizballah,s claims to legitimacy. First, the overflights by Israeli aircraft over Lebanese territory should stop. Second, maps indicating the placement of landmines laid during the most recent war should be turned

over to Lebanon to aid in mine disposal. Third, Sheba'a Farms should be turned over to the UN. Of these three additional steps, the Sheba'a Farms turnover was the "key of keys."⁸ Sheba'a Farms is claimed by both Syria and Lebanon. Part of Hizballah's stated reason for existence is the recovery of all Lebanese lands occupied by Israel. After the pullout at the end of the summer war, Sheba'a remains the only Lebanese-claimed land still occupied by Israel. Were Israel to turn the land over to the UN and withdraw, Sheba'a Farms could no longer serve as justification for Hizballah to remain armed. It would also be attractive to resolve Sheba'a Farms by legal means, rather than by force.

SYRIA

¶9. (C) The Codel asked Hariri if he thought that there would be any benefit to the U.S. seeking engagement with Damascus. Hariri said he is not against engagement per se. But any attempt at engagement by asking for Syrian help in resolving regional crises would be perceived by the Syrians as a weakness to be exploited. That perception would empower Syria, causing it to be bolder and more aggressive in asserting its power over Lebanon. He added that the U.S. and the rest of the international community could not allow themselves to draw into the trap of offering incentives in exchange for Syria's cooperation. Such overtures would allow Syria to dictate to the UN, through the threat of further incitement of violence in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq, if its demands were not met. Syria has an international obligation to promote stability in the region by not interfering in the domestic affairs of other nations. It must be made to adhere to those obligations without provision of incentives.

¶10. (C) Hariri believes that Syria had been emboldened by the lack of action on the part of West after the war, particularly in response to the widely-reported 12 different violations of the ban on importation of weapons to Lebanon. Despite these violations, Hariri said he did not think the international community would act against Syria. When Senator Dodd suggested that UNSCR 1701 lacked firmness and needed to be replaced or supplemented, Hariri replied that 1701 and any new resolutions should be targeted at Syria, and not Lebanon. The ban on extra-governmental importation of

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weapons to Lebanon only hurts the Lebanese) the militants are still receiving their weapons thanks to the smuggling, and they don't fear reprisals due to the lack of response by the international community.

¶11. (C) Hariri said that if we are to combat Syria's increasing assertion of influence in Lebanon and elsewhere, the best solution would be a united front adopted by the international community in a single voice. All countries interacting with Syria should be saying the same things. They should also be saying them through the same channel to give the message a unity of voice. As an example, he referred to the Cedar Revolution, which began on March 14, ¶2005. After his father's assassination, the world, speaking as one through the UN, told Syria to leave Lebanon immediately. While Syria had at first demurred, and then demanded more time (waiting for pressure to wane), Syria did leave Lebanon quickly when truly pressured. Pressure has waned, however, and Syria is still seeking to influence Lebanon through its proxies. He believes that another opportunity like the one immediately after his father's death has arisen, wherein the international community's once again speaking with one voice in response to the unrest in Lebanon. In his view, unity of pressure on Syria is the only way to resolve the current crisis. The only pressure the Syrian regime responds to is pressure that threatens the current regime's existence.

¶12. (C) Pressure has been used successfully before. For

example, when Hafez Al-Asad was still president, Kurdish rebels raided from Syria into Turkey, Turkey moved 100,00 troops to Syria's border. Within 24 hours, Syria delivered up the leader of the Kurdish rebels. What will not work are discussions of how Syria can help the U.S. in the region. Such actions put the U.S. in debt to Syria, and weaken the U.S. position accordingly. He asked rhetorically why the Syrian border with Iraq seemed to be the most problematic border for battling the Iraqi insurgent, when other nations adjacent to Iraq seem to be able to control their borders. He stated that the other nations were either democratic or they valued stability in Iraq. Syria does not value stability because it gains leverage from the chaos in Iraq, and thus it does not control its borders. This was understandable when one considered the implicit internal threat to the regime that arises from being surrounded by stable democracies. How could it look in comparison? How could the regime survive? He added that Israel is a good neighbor for the Syrian regime, since chaos in the region gives Israel a reason to strike Lebanon in pursuit of Iran's proxies in the south. In his view, Iran finances the radicals, Syria supplies them, and the Lebanese get killed for it. In short, either the March 14 Movement wins, or Lebanon becomes part of the Iranian empire. The U.S. must decide and engage with the moderates in Lebanon, and not the extremists in Syria.

IRAN AND HIZBALLAH-----

¶13. (C) Hariri said Iran is the other regional power seeking to influence events in Lebanon, through its proxy, Hizballah. Iran began to support Hizballah in the 1980s as part of its overall strategy of destabilizing the region. Hizballah is like a small child who has grown with Iran's support into an adult. Hariri expressed frustration at Hizballah's unwillingness to compromise, noting that he had on several occasions attempted to reach out to the leaders of Hizballah, but had been rebuffed each time. He believed that this reaction was in line with what he described as Iran's attempt to split various Middle Eastern countries along sectarian lines into Shi'a and Sunni states. In this respect, Iran has been backing Hamas against Fatah in Palestine, supporting Shi'a militants in Bahrain, and supporting Shi'a militants in Iraq against Sunni and western forces. He referred to those countries as 'pressure points'.⁸ Iran has succeeded in promoting internal conflicts in various countries as a means of splitting them. To weaken Iran, Syria must be controlled and separated from Iran. The Asad regime must also be made to feel that it will suffer consequences if it meddles in the affairs of other nations.

RUSSIA

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¶14. (C) Hariri, when asked about Russia's intentions toward Iran and Syria, stated that Russia would make the 'right decisions' in Lebanon. He said he had met with President Putin six months ago, and had been told by Putin that Russia 'could not accept a nuclear Iran'.⁸ Hariri thought that Russia was pursuing a bargaining position with the U.S., and would resist voting on measures to penalize Iran to gain leverage. He further noted that while the USSR had excellent relations with Hafez Al-Asad, Russia did not have the same relationship with Bashar. Both Hariri and his father harbored hopes for Bashar Al-Asad and persuaded the Saudis to support Bashar over his uncle Rifat. All had since been disappointed. Hariri acknowledged that Russia has interests in the region, but stated confidently that those interests lie with the March 14 group in Lebanon, rather than with the opposition.

SAUDI ARABIA

¶15. (C) Senator Dodd asked Hariri how the international community should go about &getting tough8 with Iran and Syria. Would Saudi Arabia join with Syria if the international community,s &patience wears out?8 Hariri replied that he did not believe that the Saudis would back Iran and Syria in such an event. The Syrian media had recently been attacking the Saudis and Egyptians. The Arab media, in turn, were &sounding alarms8 over a nuclear Iran.

UNITED STATES

¶16. (C) Senator Kerry asked Hariri whether overt American aid helped or hurt the Lebanese government. Hariri replied immediately that it helped. He added that American pressure applied to Lebanon,s neighbors (Israel and Syria) would help too. American military and economic assistance would help the government combat the spread of fundamentalism caused by poverty and concerns over security in the country. However, the aid must come more quickly, particularly the military aid. He stated that the LAF is well-trained, and has stayed neutral in the political fray thus far, as it should. But it needs to be strong enough to defend the nation and thus take away part of Hizballah,s reason for existence.

¶17. (U) This cable has been cleared by Codel Dodd.

FELTMAN